Supporting Students in Foster Care
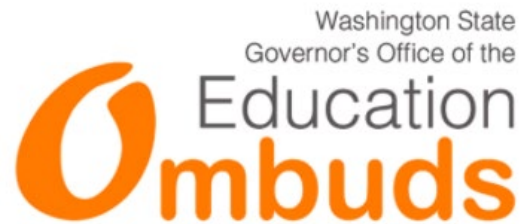
Governor's Office of the Education Ombuds (OEO): Tackling K-12 Opportunity Gaps in Washington's Public Schools

Washington State
Governor's Office of the
Education

Ombuds

We listen. We inform. We help solve problems.

Phone: 1-866-297-2597   Web: www.oeo.wa.gov

Founded by the state legislature in 2006.

Mission: We work with families, communities, and schools to address problems together so that every student can fully participate and thrive in Washington's K-12 public schools.

Functions:

- Independent, informal conflict resolution

- Outreach and training

- Policy

Issues and Supports for Students in Foster Care (March 2020-Present)

Frequent concerns:

- Special education (e.g., evaluation, implementation, mental health, discipline) (40%+)
- Enrollment/transfer
- Bullying

Supports:

- Individual assistance
- Outreach to family groups and foster-supporting organizations for workshops, coaching, and information-sharing
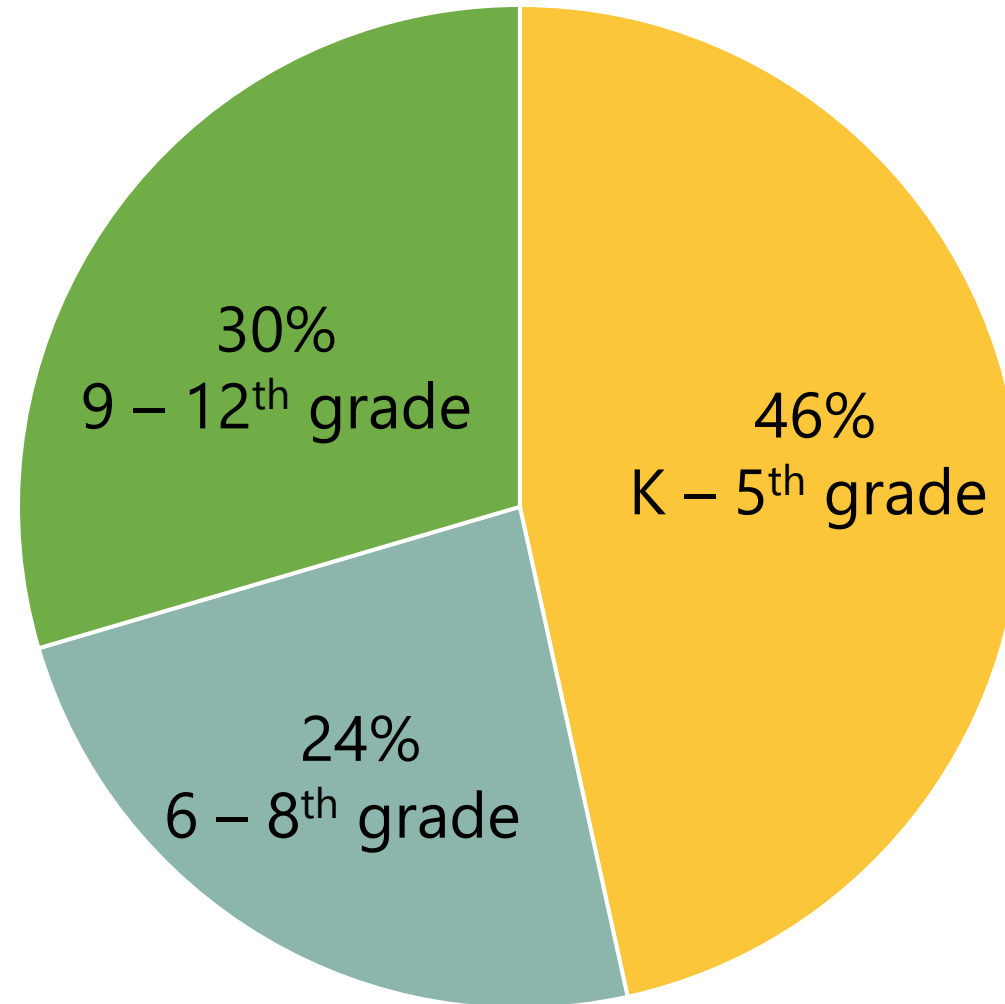- Partnering with district liaisons, WISE, and nonprofits

**Goal: Improve Educational Outcomes
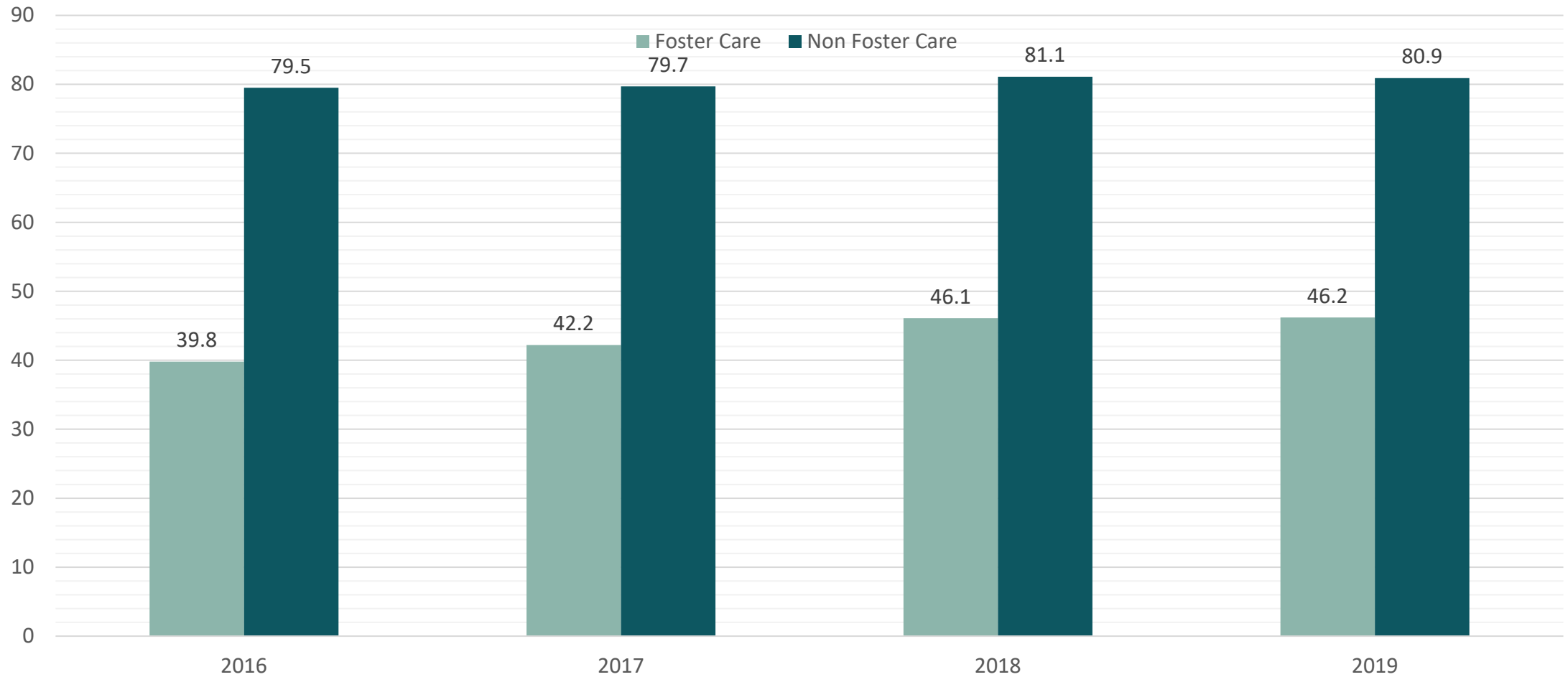for Students in Foster Care**

Peggy Carlson
Foster Care Program Supervisor

- Collaboration with Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF)
- Technical Assistance & Guidance
- Training
- Contract Management – Treehouse
- Workgroups
  - Project Education Impact
  - DCYF Citizen Review Panel
  - Passport to College Leadership Team
  - Commission on Children in Foster Care

Students in Foster Care
Total Enrollment 2021 = 5,181

30%
9 – 12th grade

46%
K – 5th grade

24%
6 – 8th grade

■ K-5th   ■ 6-8th   ■ 9-12th

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4-Year Graduation Rates

OSPI Report Card

Educational Stability for Students in Foster Care

- School of origin rights
- Best Interest Determination
- Immediate enrollment
- Collaboration between schools and child welfare
- Foster care liaison in every district

Building Points of Contact

(SB 5184 Sponsored by Senator Nobles)

Requires each K-12 school to designate a foster care building point of contact.

Implementation Team included:
- Young adults with lived experience
- Mockingbird
- Treehouse
- Building Changes
- Office of Education Ombuds
- Dept. of Children, Youth & Families
- WA Assoc. of Child Advocates
- Assoc. of WA School Principals
- School Districts

Foster Care Building Points of Contact

Students in foster care have unique educational needs that often go unnoticed; they also have specific rights under federal and state law. The building point of contact should know which students in the school are in foster care and what rights those students have.

Day 1: Welcoming Students to a New School When students in foster care must change schools, several vital objectives should be completed on the student's first day. If the student has an IEP or 504 plan, connect with their special education teacher or case manager immediately. Ask the DCYF caseworker to complete a School Notification Form.

What is "foster care"?

Foster care is defined as placement away from the parent/guardian while child welfare maintains placement and care authority. This may be a foster home, relative placement, group home or other placement deemed suitable by child welfare. In Washington state, the primary child welfare agency is the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF), although students under the sole jurisdiction of Tribal and federal child welfare also qualify.

Building points of contact should ensure the student:

- [ ] Has someone to welcome them, introduce them to key people at the school (teachers, school counselor, principal), and give them a tour of the school.
- [ ] Has their schedule and knows how to get to class.
- [ ] Is provided all necessary school supplies.
- [ ] Knows where the cafeteria is and the process for getting lunch.
- [ ] Knows how they are getting to and from school.
- [ ] Knows how to find their locker, the bathrooms, the nurse's office, etc.

Weeks 1 and 2: Helping Students Settle into a New School Building points of contact should ensure:

- [ ] All fees/fines are paid (sports, books, etc.).
- [ ] Student has online access to grades and homework.
- [ ] Student and caregiver know the attendance policy of the school. Student has an adult to help with homework.
- [ ] Student and caregiver know about available extracurricular activities.
- [ ] Student has access to necessary technology (WiFi in the home, Chromebook/Tablet, etc.).

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Ongoing Support

for District Foster Care Liaisons and Building Points of Contact

- Annual Building Points of Contact Training
- Annual Foster Care 101
- Monthly Office Hours
- Bi-monthly Forums
- Regional Meetings
- GovDelivery
- Website
- Email/phone/Zoom

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Challenges

- Lack of capacity (liaisons manage multiple programs)
- Transportation
- Student disengagement
- Communication gaps with DCYF
  - Students moved without notification to schools
  - Caseworkers not aware of federal/state requirements
  - School not included in best interest determinations

Highlights

- Increased awareness at the building level
- Increased collaboration within and between districts
- Regional partnerships
- More emphasis on individual student need
- More interest in trauma informed practices

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Treehouse Intended Impact

Treehouse advances equity and racial justice

in the foster care and education systems.

By 2027, 90% of youth who have experienced foster care

across Washington state will complete high school,

with support and a plan to transition into independence.

treehouse

Treehouse Programs

Fostering Futures

Educational Advocacy (Pre K – 12th)

› Short-term, problem-centered barrier removal

Graduation Success (9th – 12th)

› Long-term, intensive support toward graduation

Launch Success (post-HS to age 25)

› Navigation into independence

Essentials & Experiences

› Financial resources

› Material resources

› Driver's Assistance

› Holiday Magic

treehouse

PEI 2022 Priorities re: Students in Foster Care

› Ensure uniform practice and consistent capacity to address the educational stability of students in foster care (Senator Hunt advancing proviso to add to DCYF & OSPI capacity)

› Align and strengthen law to ensure all students experiencing foster care have legal access to programs and services (HB 1955)

› Ensure accountability to DCYF education goals by adding education expert to DCYF Oversight Board (HB 1936)

› Extend and expand funding for mental and behavioral health supports for early childhood programs

treehouse

How Education System Can Improve Outcomes

Dedicate resources to address the educational needs of students in foster care:

› Increase OSPI & DCYF capacity to provide training and technical assistance to districts (Hunt's proviso)

› Increase school transportation funding, eliminating financial barriers to implementing best interest school placement determination law

› Ensure all district foster care liaisons and school building points of contact get trained on their responsibilities

› Ensure all district foster care liaisons have capacity that is right-sized for the district

› Ensure all district foster care liaisons can work through summer—August is a critical time

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How Education System Can Improve Outcomes

To address specific challenges presented by COVID-19 educational disruption, we asked OSPI and districts to use one-time federal relief dollars to:

› **Create additional staffing capacity or contract with a community-based provider to:**

  › Re-engage students who have not been attending or have been disenrolled

  › Assess learning loss and provide academic acceleration supports

  › Proactively and urgently address school engagement, attendance and school refusal in partnership with caseworker and caregiver

  › Provide compensatory special education services

  › Meet the increased mental health needs of each student

treehouse

Long-term: Improving Outcomes for Students in Foster Care

› Fund flexible ECEAP slots available for every 3 and 4 year old in foster care

› Partner with DCYF to publicly report school changes for students in foster care to ensure school stability law is being implemented

› Align High School and Beyond Plan to IEP/504 and DCYF transition to adulthood plans

› Pilot school-based caregiver recruitment strategy to keep kids in their school of origin

› OSPI & DCYF must partner to address issues in institutional education

› Eliminate the practice of exclusionary discipline

› Establish truly inclusive and trauma-informed school settings

› Increase access to Career Connected Learning

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Thank You!

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A note about educational outcomes for students in foster care...

OSPI and DCYF have established a data exchange which allows us to identify all students who are in out-of-home care under the authority of DCYF. This information is used to identify foster care students for purposes of reporting and service delivery. For reporting, we use the rule that if a student is ever in out-of-home care within the school year, they are designated as foster care for the entire school year for the purpose of reporting. The one exception to this is graduation rate, which looks at a student's foster care status across 9th through 12th grades and designates them as foster care if they were ever in foster care in grades 9–12.